

BEYOND ACCOMODATION

Presented by Kristi Loftus



About Me

Kristi Loftus
Outreach Coordinator
Camper Support Specialist



What We'll Cover

1

What you know

2

Autism: Defined

3 Neuro-Affirming
Language

4

What you may see

5

Strategies

6

Q&A/Discussion

What is Autism?



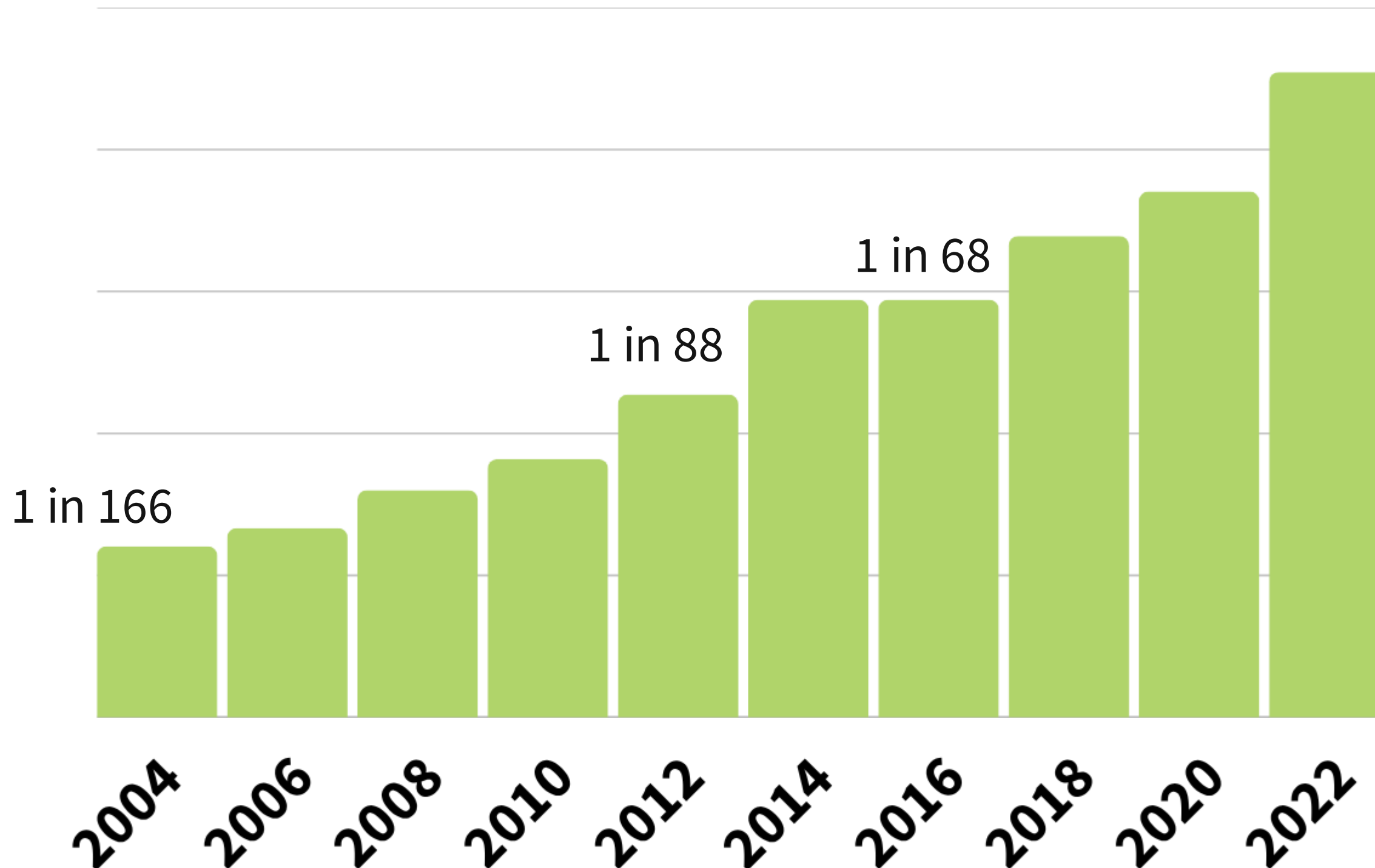
What is Autism?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition involving persistent challenges with social communication, restricted interests, and repetitive behavior. While autism is considered a lifelong disorder, the degree of impairment varies between individuals with autism.



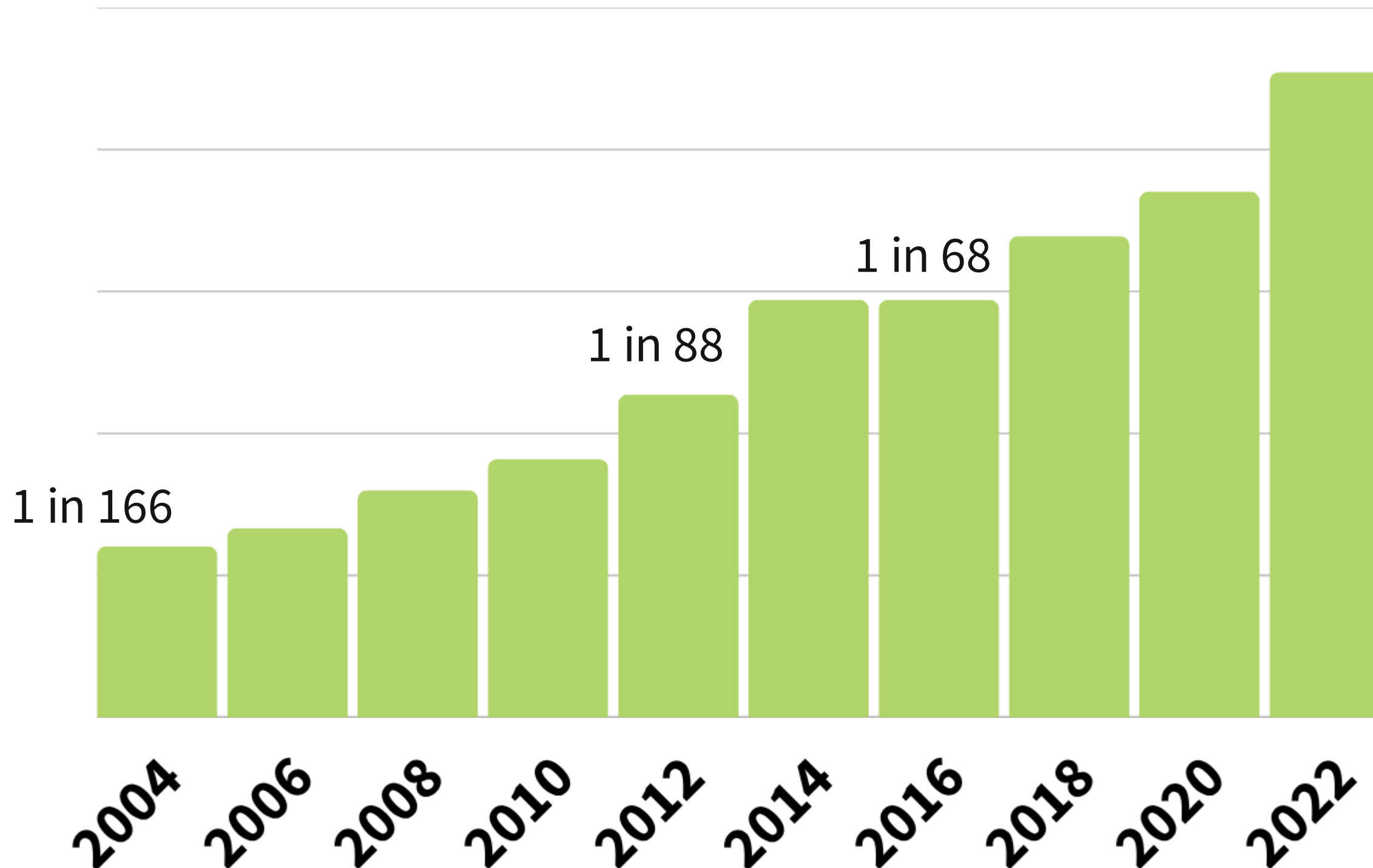
It Cannot Be Ignored

Autism Prevalence Rates



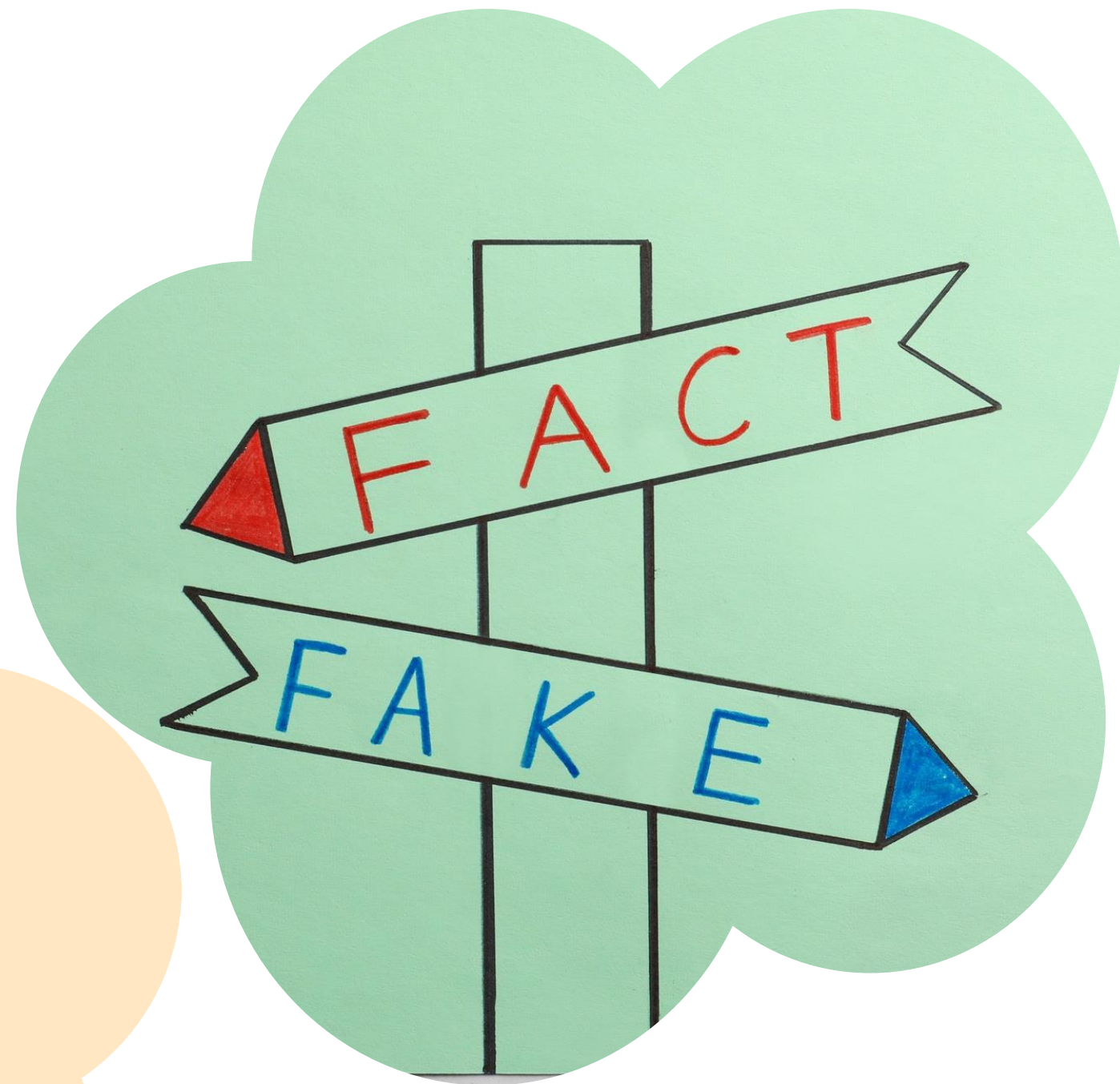
It Cannot Be Ignored

Autism Prevalence Rates



**1 in 31
in 2026**





Common Myths

There are many misconceptions about autism...

- "All autistic people are the same"
- "Behavior = defiance"
- "Lack of empathy"
- "They just need to try harder"

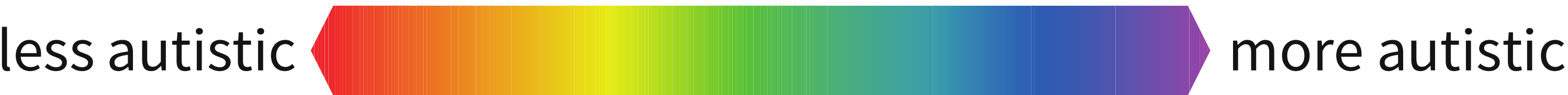
What have you heard?



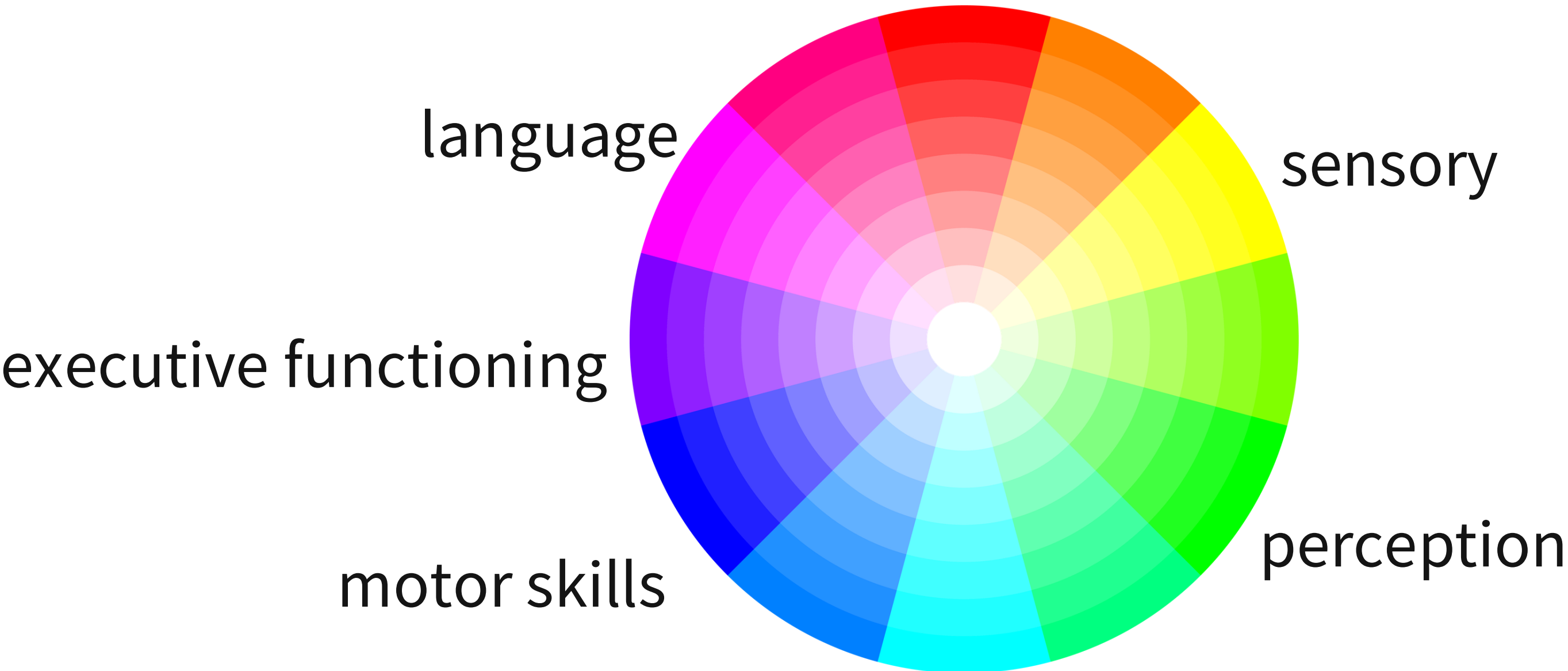
Impact Of Misunderstanding

- Increased anxiety & burnout
- Mislabeling behaviors
- Missing out on relationships & special talents
- Punitive responses instead of support
- Lack of trust
- Shut down
- Fear

What people think the autism spectrum looks like:



What it actually can look like:



A level system



THE THREE LEVELS OF AUTISM



1.

LEVEL 1 Requiring Support

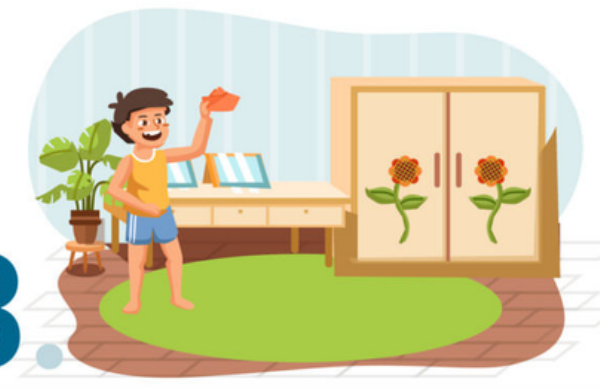
- Lowest Level and “Highest Functioning”
- Difficulty initiating social interactions
- Decreasing interest in social interactions
- Struggling with switching between activities
- Organizing and planning problems



2.

LEVEL 2 Requiring Substantial Support

- Noticeable social impairments even with support
- Problems with verbal and nonverbal social communication
- Struggling coping with change
- Changing focus or activities can cause distress
- Frequently appearing restrictive or repetitive behaviors



3.

LEVEL 3 Requiring Very Substantial Support

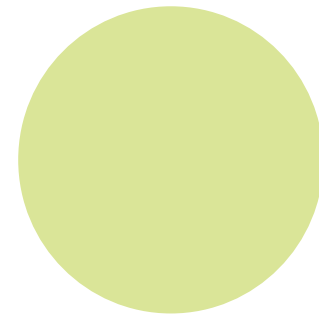
- Severe problems with verbal and nonverbal social communication
- Frequently appearing restrictive or repetitive behaviors that interfere with daily functioning in all aspects of life
- Changing focus or activities cause severe distress
- Extreme difficulty coping with change
- Rarely speaking logically and with few words



If you have met one person with autism.
you have met one person with autism.

-Dr. Stephen Shore

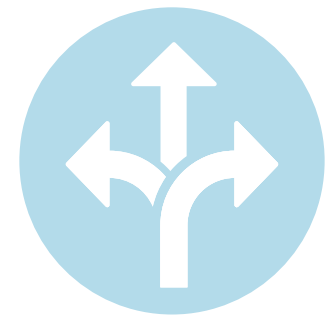
What you May See



Differences in Executive Functioning



Emotional Control



Mental flexibility



**Goal-directed
persistence**



**self-monitoring,
self-reflecting**



**organization and
managing materials**



**planning and
prioritizing**



**inhibition and
impulse control**



**sustained
attention**



task initiation



time management



working memory



The Sensory Experience

Sensory experiences can differ significantly from person to person, shaping how individuals perceive and interact with the world.

- Hypersensitive (over-responsive)
- Hyposensitive (under-responsive)

These differences aren't just preferences—they influence:

- comfort
- communication
- participation.

Understanding and accommodating sensory needs is a key part of creating truly inclusive environments.



The Sensory Experience: Supports

Environment

- ☐ Reduce loud or sudden noises where possible
- ☐ Adjust lighting (avoid harsh fluorescent lighting when possible)
- ☐ Provide quiet or low-stimulation spaces
- ☐ Minimize clutter and visual overload

Sensory Tools

- ☐ Offer noise-canceling headphones
- ☐ Provide fidget tools or sensory items
- ☐ Allow sunglasses or hats indoors if helpful
- ☐ Offer weighted or calming items when appropriate



The Sensory Experience: Supports

Flexibility & Breaks

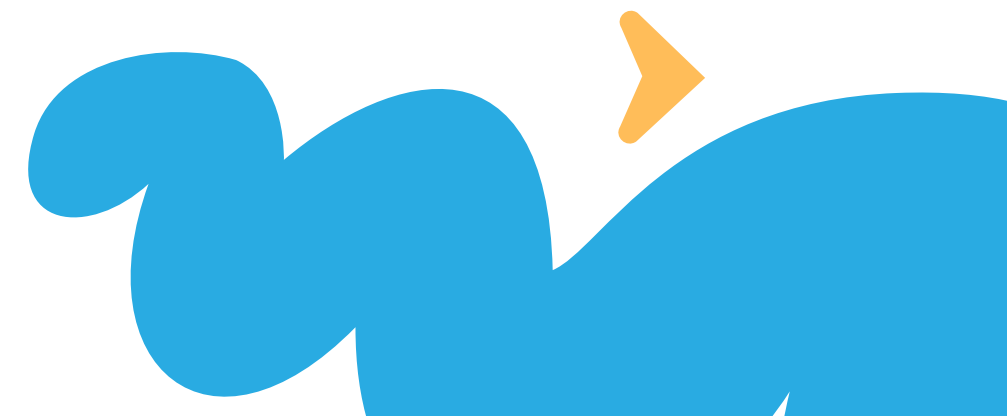
- ☐ Allow sensory breaks when needed
- ☐ Avoid requiring constant group participation
- ☐ Provide options to step away without penalty

Predictability & Preparation

- ☐ Give advance notice of loud events or changes
- ☐ Use clear schedules or visual agendas
- ☐ Prepare individuals for transitions

Attitude & Inclusion

- ☐ Treat sensory needs as valid, not disruptive
- ☐ Ask individuals what supports help them
- ☐ Adjust environments when possible, not just expectations



Communication

Communication preferences & needs vary greatly in those with autism.

- May be verbal or nonverbal/nonspeaking
- Processing time varies greatly, allow that time!
- Literal interpretation common– sarcasm & metaphors may be difficult to interpret

Delayed response ≠ noncompliance

Social cues—like tone, facial expressions, or implied meanings—may not always be intuitive, and small talk can feel unnecessary.

These differences aren't deficits; they simply represent another way of processing and expressing information.





**Please
Remember**

**ALL BEHAVIOR
IS A FORM OF
COMMUNICATION**

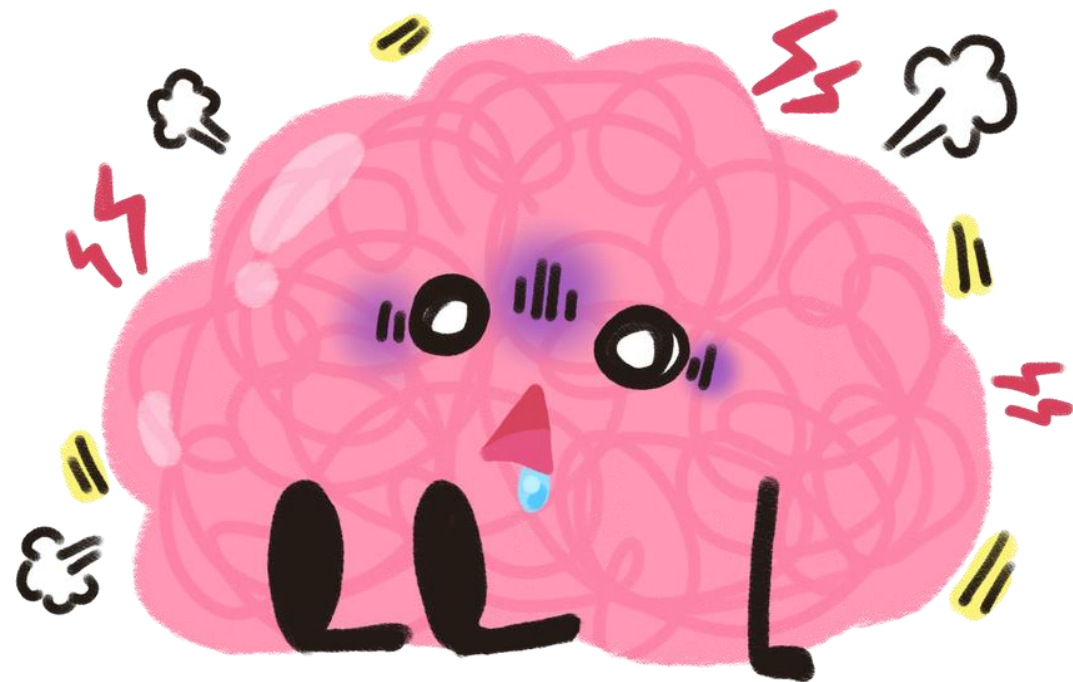




Tantrum

A tantrum is a **goal driven** outburst where an individual retains some control to get what they want.





Meltdown

An **involuntary** response to sensory or emotional overload where the brain loses the ability to regulate.

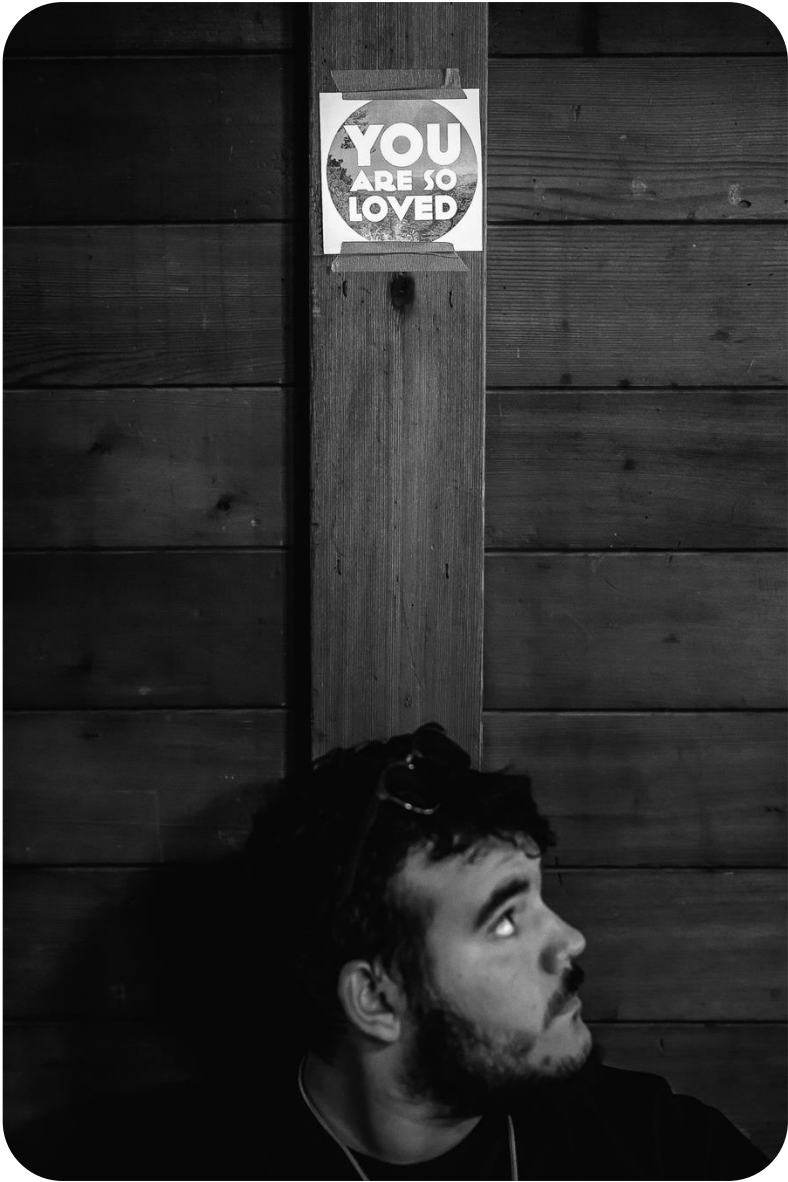


How Can We Support Each in



Provide transition warnings

Use Visual Supports and Schedules



Ask preferences instead of assuming



**Include them in
decisions
whenever
possible**

**Remember
behavior is a
form of
communication**



**Honor routines
and interests**

**How
Can We
Support
Each**



How Can We Support Each



Meet Sensory
Needs

Open conversations about
inclusion and support for ALL



How Can We Support



**Build an
authentic
connection**

**Presume
competence**



**Use
neuro-affirming
language (not
deficit-driven)**



Language Matters

Language plays a powerful role in how autism is understood and experienced. The words we choose can either reinforce stigma or promote respect and inclusion.

- Some individuals prefer **identity-first language** (“autistic person”), while others **prefer person-first language** (“person with autism”), and honoring those preferences is key.
- Moving away from deficit-based terms and focusing on neutral or **strengths-based language** helps shift the narrative from “something to fix” to a difference to understand. .



Deficit-Driven Language

Rigid behaviors

Social deficits

Obsessions

Is difficult to engage

does not play appropriately with toys

Neuro-Affirming Language

Prefers consistency

Social differences

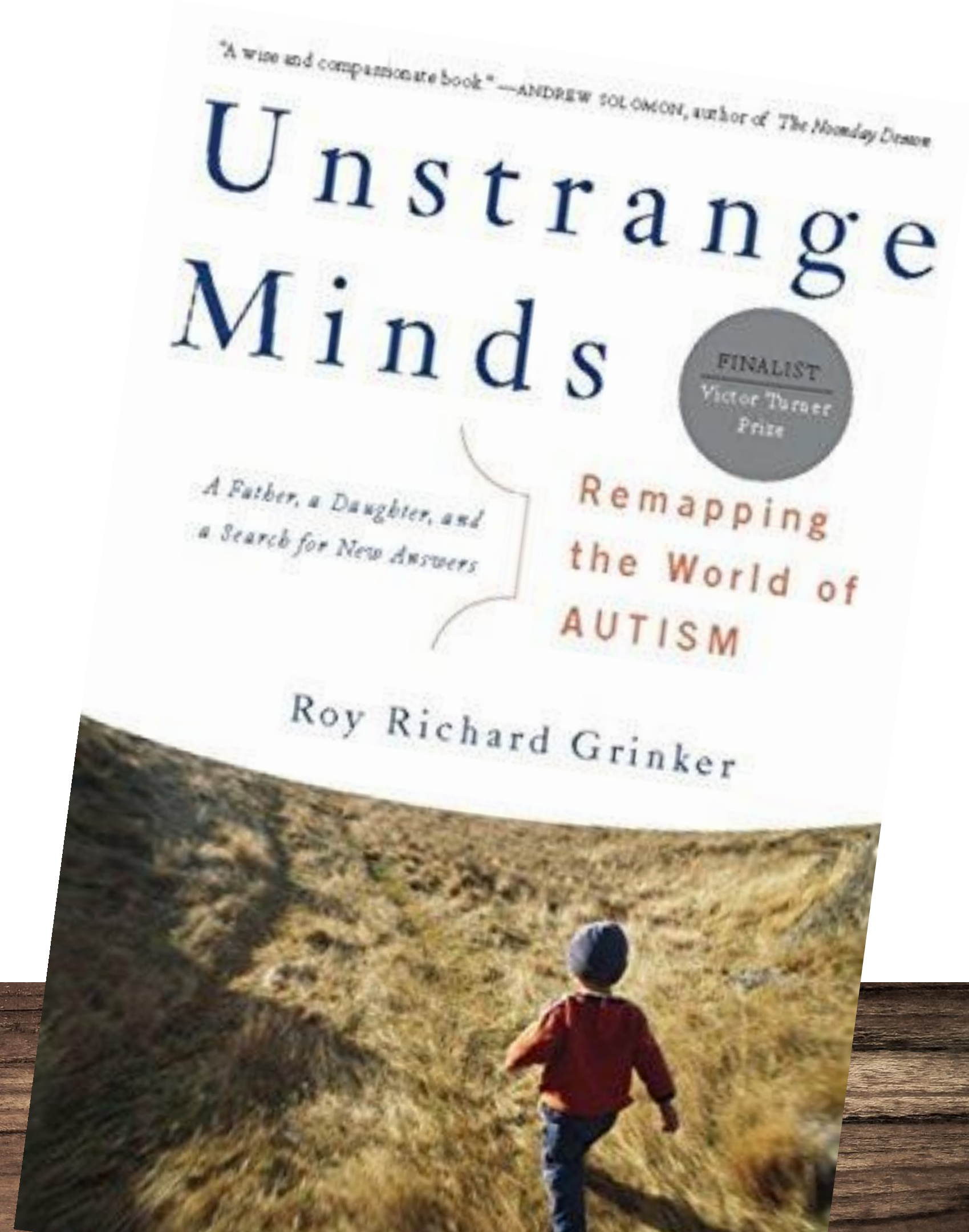
Deep interests

Focuses intently on interests

Enjoys gathering, sorting, and lining up toys

“...When it comes to a child with a disability, [professionals & parents] can easily spend too much time on what the child cannot do, ...We can be so busy dealing with what is absent that we ignore what is right before our eyes.

...what we need to make visible is not darkness but light...”



From Awareness To Action

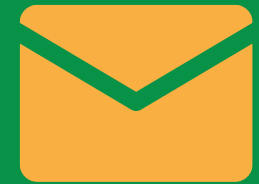
Moving from awareness to action means going beyond simply recognizing autism exists and taking **meaningful** steps to create inclusion in **everyday life**.

- Offering clear communication
- Reducing sensory overload, allowing flexibility in how people participate
- Respecting individual differences

True inclusion happens when **awareness** is paired with **intentional choices** that **remove barriers** and **value neurodiversity** in practice, not just in principle.



Get Connected



kloftus@campencourage.org



campencourage.org

